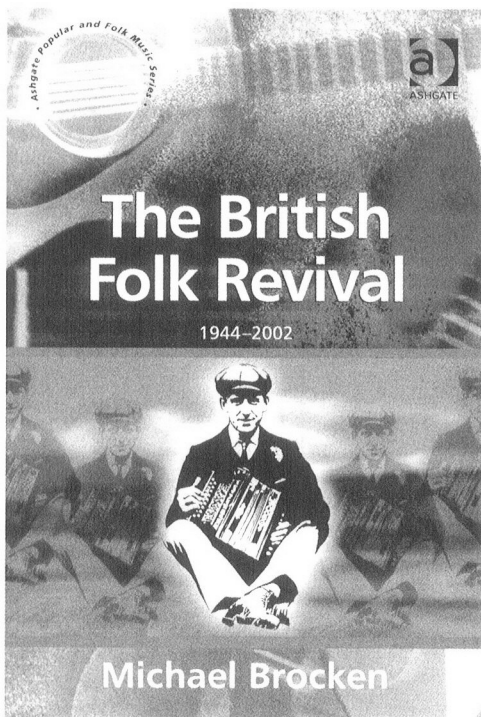


The British Folk Revival, 1944–2002

Michael Brocken. Ashgate Popular and Folk Music Series. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003. xii, 236 pp. Bibliog. Discog. Index. ISBN 0-7546-3281-4 (hbk, £47.50), 0-7546-3282-2 (pbk, £15.99)



We have a confession to make. Having agreed to review this book and having cast an initial eye over it, we contacted the Society asking to be excused. The folk scene here portrayed by Mr Brocken is not recognizable from that of which we have been a part as club organizers, performers and recording artists for upwards of forty-five years. However, having been persuaded, a good place for egotists to start was the index, and it was here that those first seeds of doubt positively burst into bloom. No Watersons, no Young Tradi-

tion, no Reg Hall. Just one brief mention of The Incredible String Band – and he fails to acknowledge their influence on the singing of such seminal English rock singers as David Bowie, who does get a mention. A single passing reference each (with no discussion whatsoever) to Bob Davenport and Anne Briggs. But some discussion of such 1960s artists as David and Marianne Dalmour, Friday Brown and Dorita y Pepe? Only the former ever sang in folk clubs out of choice, surely? One person who has sought to widen the repertoire beyond the expected is June Tabor, and she gets one mention (as a ‘miscreant’ with the approved-of Oyster Band). Odd. Oh, and The Oyster Band’s one time *alter ego* Fiddlers Dram are vilified out of hand as ‘the worst-ever English Folk Band’ which, quite simply, is not true.

Brocken’s comments about earlier collectors’ perceptions of an ‘intrinsic Englishness’ in the tunes which they had collected make interesting reading and ring true. How indeed could collectors spot such a quality when what they had collected represented only a small and quite deliberately targeted part of the repertoire of their subjects/informants? And it is surely true that this fantasy ‘Englishness’ was manufactured as part of a general resistance to ‘German-ness’ in music and fuelled by a deep suspicion of the same. A greatly intensified version of that same resistance is to be found in Kipling’s reference to ‘... lesser breeds without the law ...’ so it is safe to assume that such feelings were indeed general. We were at one with Mr Brocken in his scorn for Sharp’s romancing of the supposed ‘natural’ state of a people apparently ‘untouched by modern civilisation’ although our scorn is softened by the feeling that it’s perhaps time to temper the Sharp-bashing a little. The man had warts.